

HEALTH NEWS *from*

FALL 2016

# st. mary's

REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

## Redefining *her future*

Spring Halper describes how  
a mammogram at St. Mary's  
changed her life

*Also inside:*

**RELIEVE YOUR STRESS**

Helpful facts and coping  
strategies

**NEW, EASIER  
HEPATITIS C TREATMENT**

What you need to know

Compliments of



**St. Mary's**  
REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER





Prevention is so important to good health, and it often starts with people like Spring Halper, who is featured on the cover of this issue. Spring is an ICU nurse at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center and a vocal advocate for breast cancer screening, following a personal experience that began here at St. Mary's with her yearly mammogram. We thank her for sharing her story and calling attention to this very important health issue.

Along with our story about Spring, this edition of *Health News* also features articles to help you stay healthy over the holidays. On page 4, we discuss stress and how to manage the pressures of work and home. We also bring you information about better sleep, preventing acid reflux and the health benefits of dark chocolate (yes, it really is good for you!).

If you're an expectant mom or planning to start a family, you might want to check out the article on the next page about breastfeeding. You can also learn in this issue about cervical cancer screening and a promising new treatment for Hepatitis C.

At St. Mary's, we're committed to meeting the diverse healthcare needs of everyone in our community. We hope you find this issue inspiring, and we wish you and your family all the best this season.



**Stanley Tatum**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

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## St. Mary's earns another **"A" FOR SAFETY**

St. Mary's Regional Medical Center was awarded an "A" rating in Hospital Patient Safety for the second time by The Leapfrog Group, an independent, national, nonprofit organization. The hospital safety score is calculated by top patient safety experts using 30 measures of publicly available hospital safety data. St. Mary's received an "A" rating for Spring 2016 and Fall 2015.

To see other awards and accreditations earned by St. Mary's, visit [www.stmarysregional.com/awards](http://www.stmarysregional.com/awards).



# The benefits of *breastfeeding* and how St. Mary's can help

Moms who come to St. Mary's to have their babies will likely get to know BirthPlace Nurse Anna Ritter, RN. Anna has been providing clinical education at the hospital for nine years and recently became board-certified as a Lactation Consultant. She is totally committed to helping new moms with breastfeeding. "Every baby is different, and every mom is different," she says. "I think breastfeeding can work for any mom, they just need different support."



Anna Ritter, RN

## *A healthy start*

"With breastfeeding, the baby gets good immunity protection, especially in the colostrum (which is the first stage of breast milk)," Ritter says.

According to the Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, research suggests that breastfed babies have lower risks of: asthma, childhood leukemia, childhood obesity, ear infections, eczema, diarrhea and vomiting, lower respiratory infections, sudden infant death syndrome, type 2 diabetes and necrotizing enterocolitis, a disease that affects the gastrointestinal tract in pre-term infants.

## *Support from hospital to home*

"In the hospital, we keep track of all the feedings and diaper changes and make sure the baby is getting enough nutrition," says Ritter. "We have different ways to provide support and can supplement feedings, if necessary."

Two days after moms leave the hospital, they are invited back to St. Mary's for a follow-up visit. "We can check the baby's weight and answer questions," says Ritter. "I've never been to another hospital that offers this."

Moms who need more support can schedule lactation visits at St. Mary's or call the hospital at 580-249-3437. Nurses on the floor have taken a breastfeeding continuing education program, Ritter notes. "We want moms to know there's help available after they leave the hospital," she says. ■

## *Good for mom, too*

The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that breastfeeding may offer benefits to mom, including:

- decreased postpartum bleeding and more rapid involution (shrinking) of the uterus
- decreased menstrual blood loss and increased child spacing (due to the absence of periods during breastfeeding)
- earlier return to prepregnancy weight
- decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers



For more information about The BirthPlace at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, visit [www.stmarysregional.com/birthplace](http://www.stmarysregional.com/birthplace).

# *Feeling* **STRESSED?**

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Your body can be affected in many different ways—from sleeplessness and headaches to acid reflux and even heart disease.

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Jahangir Ghaznavi,  
MD

**T**here are basically two types of stress: acute and chronic, says Psychiatrist Jahangir Ghaznavi, MD, Medical Director of Resilience Behavioral Health at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center.

An example of acute stress may follow the death of a close friend or loved one, or be the result of pressure related to completing a task on a deadline.

Chronic stress is more drawn out. It may be an ongoing situation at work, where you face constant criticism, or due to a relationship that is not going well, Dr. Ghaznavi says. >



Both types of stress can cause physical and emotional problems, but chronic stress can be particularly harmful, notes Dr. Ghaznavi. It may contribute to severe anxiety, depression, insomnia, fatigue, gastrointestinal issues like acid reflux, agitation, irritability and cardiac problems, he notes.

“Many studies have found a link between work-related stress and heart disease,” the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

With both acute and chronic stress, there can be some overlap of reactions. If you are under acute stress, you may experience sweating, palpitations, decreased attention, irritability, insomnia and a short temper, says Dr. Ghaznavi. In cases of severe acute stress disorder, your blood pressure may go up or down, or you may experience “butterflies” in your stomach (a fluttery feeling), diarrhea, constipation or headaches.

When you are under stress, a hormone gets released that sets off a “fight or flight” reaction, notes Dr. Ghaznavi. When this happens, you may experience noticeable physical changes, like an increase in heart

rate, and your body prepares to either stay and deal with the stress, or run away to safety.

People who suffer from post-traumatic stress may sometimes feel the fight or flight reaction even when they are not in a traumatic situation. As described by the National Institute of Mental Health, the disorder develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. It is a devastating illness that may require long-term counseling and medication management, Dr. Ghaznavi notes.

For less severe cases of stress, he advises talking with friends and colleagues, engaging in regular exercise\* and planning ahead. (See sidebar for more coping tips.)

If you or someone you know experiences certain warning signs—such as an acute change in behavior or mood, significantly declining performance at work or more frequent visits to the doctor—these may be an indication that more help is needed.

“We all have stress in our lives,” says Dr. Ghaznavi. Learning to cope with stress can help you feel better emotionally and physically. ■

## *Try these coping strategies from Dr. Ghaznavi*

### **Holiday stress**

- Get organized. Make a list ahead of time of the cards and gifts you’d like to give.
- Plan your holiday vacation. Ask for time off at work well in advance.
- Stick to a budget. A card or a sensible gift should be satisfactory.

### **General stress**

- Plan ahead. For example, when traveling, anticipate possible traffic and delays.
- Get physical activity\* on a regular basis.
- Engage in hobbies you enjoy.
- Enjoy time with your pet.
- If you’re watching TV, try to find a show with humor and laughter.
- Spend time with friends. If you can’t do it in person, consider technology like Skype™.
- Try to imagine yourself in places you enjoy. Consider deep breathing and activities like yoga\* and tai chi.\*

***Resilience Behavioral Health at St. Mary’s is a 15-bed inpatient psychiatric unit for adults, ages 18 to 64. The program provides psychiatric evaluation, diagnosis and treatment for a number of primary psychiatric disorders.***



**For more information or to refer patients, please call 580-233-2273.**

\*Before starting an exercise program, consult your physician.



“It feels  
like a  
*huge  
relief*”

It's been just over a year since 46-year-old Spring Halper had a mammogram that would change her life. But her anxieties about breast cancer go back much further. Her mom was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was 27, and the disease took her life. “I want to be around for my daughter, to see her walk down the aisle,” Spring says of her daughter, Ashton. Early detection and a successful surgery have given her that chance. >







Alicia Vanhooser,  
MD

Spring had regular yearly mammograms since she was 27, the same age her mom was when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. When she was 45,

Spring's radiologist at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, Alicia Vanhooser, MD, discovered an abnormality on her mammogram. The next step was to get a biopsy, which Spring had done before. Past testing had revealed no cancer, but this time was different.

Spring recalls vividly what she was doing the day she got her biopsy results. Her daughter was scheduled to play a collegiate volleyball game in Oklahoma City, and she and her husband, Dieter, were getting ready to go. "It kind of changed the whole day," Spring says.

She says Dr. Vanhooser first asked her how she felt, and what she wanted to do. "She let me make the decision," Spring says. "When I told her I wanted a bilateral mastectomy (which is the removal of both breasts), she said she thought it was a good idea. I just wanted to have the surgery and put this behind me. She was very supportive."

Spring says Dr. Vanhooser gave her a list of surgeons. "She wants you to feel comfortable and send you to the best people," Spring says.

Two days before Thanksgiving 2015, Spring had a bilateral mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. Her stepmother and sister, who is a nurse, stayed with her during her recovery. Spring recalls that her family put on a fabulous Thanksgiving dinner. "They knocked it out of the park."

Today, Spring is back to work at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, where she is a nurse in the ICU. She takes a daily medication prescribed by her doctor to help her stay healthy, and she says she is feeling "really good."

Spring says that, as a nurse at St. Mary's, she has gotten to know many people who are familiar with Dr. Vanhooser's work. "She's very professional, she knows her job," Spring says. "At the same time, she's very caring and empathetic."

Today, with her treatment well behind her, Spring is a vocal advocate for screening mammograms and for Dr. Vanhooser. "She and her staff are a great asset to northwest Oklahoma," she says. ■

## ARE YOU UP TO DATE WITH YOUR *mammogram?*

Mammograms are the best way to detect breast cancer early, when it is more treatable.

The American Cancer Society's recommendations for breast cancer screening vary based on a woman's age and risk factors. Women who are at higher than average risk include women with a personal history of breast cancer, a family history of breast cancer, a genetic mutation known to increase risk of breast cancer (such as BRCA), and women who had radiation therapy to the chest before the age of 30.

***Tell your doctor if you have any of these risk factors when you schedule your next mammogram.***



**To learn more about Spring's story and Women's Imaging at St. Mary's, view the video at [www.stmarysregional.com/halper](http://www.stmarysregional.com/halper).**

# Get a good night's sleep ... and put your acid reflux to rest



It's the time of year when you may begin to fill your calendar with holiday

parties and events. Internal Medicine Physician **Jill Vilaythong, MD**, says celebrating with family and friends is fun, but changes to your routine can sometimes leave you feeling tired and run down. Also, party menus and late-night eating can take a toll on your stomach and your sleep. Get ready for the season, and plan to feel your best, with these tips.



**Q: What can I do to get a good night's rest?**

Inadequate or poor quality sleep not only makes you tired, it can also lead to memory and performance impairment, personality changes and depression. Make sure your bedroom is comfortable. Establish a relaxing routine and a regular bedtime. Wake up at the same time every morning including days off and vacation. Avoid naps or nap early. Exercise at least three hours before bedtime as it can reduce stress hormones and lead to deeper sleep at night.

**Q: How can I adjust my diet for better sleep?**

Avoid heavy meals for at least two hours before bedtime to prevent indigestion that may keep you awake at night. Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine or alcohol for at least three to four hours before bedtime. Alcohol is a depressant that may help you fall asleep, but once metabolized and cleared from your body, it acts as a stimulant and can interfere with sleep later in the night.

**Q: I have a burning sensation in my chest or throat. What could it be?**

This is a sign of heartburn. If you experience this feeling more than twice a week, then you may have gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD. This occurs when the acidic food contents of your stomach leak back into your esophagus. Long-term, GERD can lead to serious health problems such as ulcers, bleeding, difficulty swallowing and even cancer.

**Q: What can I do to prevent GERD?**

Maintain a healthy weight and avoid tight-fitting clothes. Avoid fatty, fried foods; acidic and spicy foods; caffeine; alcohol; tobacco and large meals. Wait three hours after eating before lying down. Elevate the head of your bed so it's higher than your stomach. Over-the-counter antacids can provide relief. Contact your doctor if your symptoms persist despite two weeks of lifestyle measures and antacids. Further testing may be needed. ■

*For help finding a doctor, contact St. Mary's free physician referral service by calling Direct Doctors Plus® at 580-249-3741.*



# How *sweet* it is ...

Just in time for the holidays, our dietitian discusses the health benefits of dark chocolate.



Research shows that dark chocolate can have positive effects on your health, such as decreasing bad cholesterol, reducing the risk of blood clots and increasing blood flow, says Dietitian Deirdre Postier, RD, LD. Dark chocolate also has been associated with better cognitive performance in the elderly, and some studies suggest it may lower blood pressure, Postier says.

The secret is the presence of flavonoids, which are antioxidants found in cocoa beans. Antioxidants can help prevent or delay cellular damage. “If the chocolate is darker, it has more flavonoids and offers potentially greater health benefits,” Postier says.

It’s important to keep in mind that the health boost comes from dark chocolate—not milk chocolate or white chocolate, Postier notes. People should look for dark chocolate that has at least 60 percent cocoa. Eating about one ounce per day, or up to 7 ounces per week, can offer benefits. That’s less each day than a regular-size chocolate bar, which is about 1.5 oz., Postier notes.

While planning your daily menu, remember that dark chocolate still has plenty of calories and sugar. “I would say that if you have a weakness for it, don’t keep very much around,” says Postier. (See sidebar.) Additionally, be aware that dark chocolate contains oxalates that may be problematic for people prone to developing oxalate kidney stones.

As with any food you enjoy, Postier encourages you to eat your dark chocolate mindfully. “Take the time to look at it, smell it, unwrap it,” she says. “Put it in your mouth slowly. Let it melt in your mouth. Then it will be more satisfying to you.” ■

**To find a doctor for yourself or your family, please call our FREE Direct Doctors Plus® physician referral service at 580-249-3741.**

## *Taming your sweet tooth*

Even though dark chocolate can be healthy, it’s not good to eat too much. If you’re inclined to overindulge, you can decrease your cravings for sweets and desserts by eating fruit, says Postier. She recommends keeping lots of different-colored fruits in the house to get a variety of nutrients.

If you feel a craving coming on, try to put it off by going for a walk or keeping busy. Also, drink fluids, schedule meals and snack times so you don’t get too hungry, and buy single servings if portion control is a challenge.

# *Living better with* **HEPATITIS C**

## **NEW TREATMENT OFFERS PROMISE**

An estimated 2.7 to 3.9 million people in the United States have chronic Hepatitis C, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This is a contagious liver disease caused by a virus. For some people, it lasts only a short time; but for most people it becomes chronic. If left untreated, chronic Hepatitis C can damage the liver over time, leading to serious and potentially fatal health issues.



Chris Schultz, DO

One of the challenges for people living with this disease has been coping with demanding and difficult treatment regimens, says Internal Medicine Physician Chris Schultz, DO. Treatment for Hepatitis C genotype 1 (the most common strain in the United States) could be very complicated in the past, and often entailed different medications and side effects. “Now, Hepatitis C treatment is on the cutting edge of medicine,” he notes. “In many instances, treatment is one pill, once a day.”

Hepatitis C is usually spread when blood from a person infected with the virus enters the body of someone not infected, by sharing needles, syringes or other equipment to inject drugs; by needlestick injuries; or by being born to a mother who has Hepatitis C. Less commonly, people can become infected by sharing personal items that may contact another person’s blood, such as a razor, or through sexual intercourse.

Many people with chronic Hepatitis C do not have any symptoms until years after they’ve been infected, when liver problems develop. In people without symptoms, Hepatitis C may be detected during routine blood tests. ■



**Dr. Schultz of St. Mary’s Physician Associates specializes in Internal Medicine, including gastrointestinal care and colonoscopy screenings. If you would like more information on these services or Hepatitis C treatments, contact your primary care physician for a referral or call Dr. Schultz’s office at 580-249-3904.**



# What you need to know about cervical cancer, Pap tests and HPV



**Cervical cancer is the easiest gynecologic cancer to prevent, with regular screening and follow-up.\* But the screening recommendations are not the same for every woman.**



**Kimberly Roark, MD**

“It’s important to visit your doctor and discuss how often you should have a Pap smear,” says OB/GYN Kimberly

Roark, MD. “It is extremely individualized.” For some women, Pap smears may be recommended as often as every six months; other women may go three to five years between Pap smears. These decisions are based on risk, says Dr. Roark. Catching potential problems when they are precancerous can make a tremendous difference in preventing cervical cancer, she says.

“Many people don’t realize that cervical cancer is not genetic, it’s caused by a virus that is sexually transmitted,” says Dr. Roark.

The human papillomavirus (HPV), which can cause cervical and other cancers, is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Most people who become infected with HPV do not know they have it. ... By age 50, at least four out of every five women will have been infected with HPV at one point in their lives,” the CDC says.

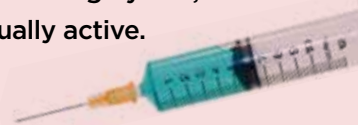
To screen for cervical cancer, Pap smears should begin at age 21, Dr. Roark says. Exams may be done earlier if there are problems.

Starting at age 30 or older, an HPV test may also be given to determine if a person has the HPV virus. If testing is positive, that person is monitored more closely, Dr. Roark says.

Cervical cancer used to be the leading cause of cancer death for women in the United States, according to the CDC. But thanks largely to preventive measures, it has significantly declined. Talking with your doctor and being proactive can help you stay healthy. ■

\*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Getting an HPV vaccine earlier in life is a safe and effective way to avoid HPV and the associated health problems it may cause, including cervical cancer, Dr. Roark says. The best time to administer the vaccine, she says, is during girls’ and boys’ pre-teen and teenage years, before they are sexually active.**



**Contact your OB/GYN or family practice doctor to discuss cervical cancer screening. For help finding a doctor, call our free Direct Doctors Plus® referral line at 580-249-3741.**

# Welcome, new physicians!



**Mason B. Andrews, MD**  
**Neurosurgeon**

**St. Mary's Neurosurgery**  
102 S. Van Buren, Suite 2  
Enid, OK 73703  
580-242-7030



**Stephen S. Hwang,**  
**MD, PhD**

**St. Mary's Gastroenterology**  
330 S. Fifth Street, Suite 305  
Enid, OK 73701  
580-249-3003



**Inhyup Kim, MD**  
**Neurologist**

**St. Mary's Neurology Clinic**  
310 S. Fourth Street  
Enid, OK 73701  
580-297-5166

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